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Moscow Stations now a Platform for Artists

By Simone Peek

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Visitors admiring paintings on display at Kazansky Station, now a draw for art connoisseursas well as travellers. **Vladimir Filonov**

Train stations often pull in neighborhood riffraff like moths to a flame, drawing those who aim to scam travelers, sleep off their drink, and pursue any other dodgy business that requires anonymity. Therefore, most people try to limit the time they spend around stations.

Russian Railways (RZD), the state-owned railway company, has launched an initiative intended not only to encourage people to visit stations, but also to teach them about art and culture. The first train station art center is located at Rizhsky station, and the concept is named Vauxhall.

"RZD hopes to open a "Vauxhall" in every large train station in Russia," said Anna Abbasova, head of the department of culture and communication at RZD. "The implementation will be different, but they will all be named Vauxhall."

The Rizhsky gallery currently has a train-themed exhibit on display. In collaboration with Foto-Soyuz and the Must Art gallery, they have selected a collection of photographs that depict the construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) in the 1980s.

The BAM-line is over 4000 kilometers long and passes through some of the most remote areas of Russia. The arrival of train transportation was a momentous event for those who lived near it, and the photographs illustrate this clearly. Some couples even got married on the tracks.

"The gallery won't always have train art on display," said Snezhanna Abramova, Vauxhall's art director. "But because this is our first exposition, and it is, after all, in a train station, we thought this might be fun."

Vauxhall also hosts movie screenings, live-music nights and teaches masterclasses for the artistically-orientated.

On the second floor, there is an exhibit for children featuring Romashkovo, a 1967 Soviet cartoon train. Children can see how cartoons are animated on celluloid, or play around with a kid-sized version of the character.

It's far from necessary to wait until you are taking the next train to Riga to visit Vauxhall. The gallery hopes that visitors may come by solely to see the gallery. "Our target group is people who love art. We don't aim specifically at travelers," Abramova said.

At Vauxhall, you can also witness the next step in RZD's plans to give a cultural pulse to the areas around stations. There is a running contest for young sculptors to design a statue for the square at Paveletsky Station. Miniature sculptures are on display at Vauxhall, and votes can be cast online or at the gallery.

At Kazansky Station one can find another art center that hosts multi-disciplinary events. This gallery is privately owned and currently has a collection of large romantic and realistic paintings by Dimitrii Belyukin on display.

Vauxhall is located at 1 Rizhky Station. The gallery is open Wednesday to Sunday. Entrance is free. For more information please visit: www.art-vokzal.ru *and* www.belukin.ru

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